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SECURITY INFORMATION

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

1 August 1952

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 261

SUBJECT: Thailand Re-examining Its Pro-Western Orientation

1. There has been considerable evidence in recent months that the Thai ruling clique is dissatisfied with Thailand's strongly pro-Western orientation and may in fact be critically examining the merits of this alignment. Principal indications of such a development are:

- a. Hints in the government press that Thailand would offer only token resistance, or no resistance at all, to a Communist invasion.
- b. Repeated statements by Thai officials and the government press that Thailand has little enthusiasm for a US-sponsored Pacific Pact (which Thailand once ardently championed); that present US-UK-French efforts to increase the security of Southeast Asia might "at some stage" provoke the Chinese Communists; that Thailand would be willing to cooperate in such efforts only at "a low and inconspicuous level"; and that, since the Asian countries cannot rely on the UN alone for protection, they should band together for their own defense.
- c. [Redacted]
- d. Present reluctance by the Thai Government to pass legislation or take effective action against Communist activity within Thailand, even though the present ruling clique had justified its seizure of power on the grounds that it would stamp out Communism in Thailand.

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NO CHANGE IN CLASS.

DECLASSIFIED

CLASS. CHANGED TO: TS S (C)

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e. A less friendly attitude by Thai officials in their relations with US officials.

2. The primary factor back of this disenchantment on the part of Thai leadership is the failure of their pro-US alignment to bring the rewards originally expected. Although they have consistently supported US policy and have sent a regiment to Korea, Thailand's ruling clique has not been successful in getting a US guarantee of Thai independence. Observant of continuing Communist pressure in Korea and Indochina, faced with the prospect of a possible external Communist threat to Thailand itself, and lacking assurance of timely and effective US support, Thai leadership is retreating toward a more neutralist course, summed up by the government press as "keeping a foot in each boat."

3. Secondary factors which possibly influence Thailand's re-examination of its orientation include the following:

a. Resentment at US criticism of Thai internal measures and US insistence upon economic and military reforms. Such US actions injure Thai pride, jar Thai preferences for the status quo, and, perhaps most importantly, threaten the opportunities for private gain enjoyed by most members of Thailand's ruling clique.

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b. [REDACTED]

c. Increasing Chinese Communist internal activities and external pressures.

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d. [REDACTED]

4. Although there is a swing away from an enthusiastic pro-Westernism, the degree and seriousness of this development does not yet merit great surprise or alarm. Thailand still supports the UN effort in Korea and still pursues an officially-announced anti-Communist course. It should also be noted that many of the Thai statements reflecting less ardent pro-Westernism are motiviated by an effort to extract more support from the US. The present apparent change in Thai orientation is therefore in no sense a turning to the Communists; rather, it is in part a tactical move aimed at the US as well as a genuine retreat from an extreme position assumed under too optimistic expectations of Western assistance - a returning to Thailand's traditional posture of "a foot in each boat."

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5. The future orientation of Thailand will undoubtedly remain dependent on the degree of external Communist menace and the prospect of active US support. Without a US guarantee of Thailand's security, the present more neutralist but non-Communist course will probably continue, regardless of any foreseeable changes in Thai leadership. The only certainty with respect to the future orientation of Thailand is that this strife-ridden and exposed country will retain its traditional diplomatic flexibility, and, for the sake of survival, will adapt itself to the power situation of the moment.

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